New York Theatre Critics' Reviews 1948

Volume IX, Number 10 • Rachel W. Coffin, *Editor* • Week of April 26, 1948

1948 PRODUCTIONS

Premieres in Other Years
Original Reviews Appeared in These Volumes

1947 Vol.

Stage Play	*Page*
*Allegro	300
*Angel in the Wings	238
Antony and Cleopatra	255
*Brigadoon	427
*Command Decision	328
Cradle Will Rock (The)	229
Crime and Punishment	233
*Finian's Rainbow	486
*For Love or Money	271
*Heiress (The)	335
*High Button Shoes	304
Inspector Calls (An)	291
John Loves Mary	465
*Man and Superman	308
*Medea	295
Mikado (The)	222
Music In My Heart	324
*Streetcar Named Desire (A)	249
*Winslow Boy (The)	283
Young Man's Fancy (A)	383

•

1946 Vol.

*Annie Get Your Gun	382
*Born Yesterday	466
Burlesque	208
Call Me Mister	403
Happy Birthday	280

•

1944 Vol.

*Harvey	95

•

1943 Vol.

*Oklahoma	341
Voice of the Turtle (The)	199

•

Asterisks indicate shows scheduled to play week of April 26, 1948

1948 PRODUCTIONS

Premieres During 1948
Reviews Appear in This Volume

Stage Play	*Page*
Cox and Box	378
*Cup of Trembling (The)	288
Doctor Social	348
Ghosts	343
Gondoliers (The)	371
H.M.S. Pinafore	378
Hallams (The)	313
Harvest of Years	394
Hedda Gabler	327
Iolanthe	397
John Bull's Other Island	351
*Joy to the World	303
Kathleen	358
Last Dance (The)	367
Linden Tree (The)	317
*Look, Ma, I'm Dancin'!	364
Macbeth	297
*Make Mine Manhattan	382
*Me and Molly	322
Men We Marry (The)	379
*Mister Roberts	338
Old Lady Says "No!" (The)	342
Patience	355
Pirates of Penzance	399
Power Without Glory	390
Rats of Norway (The)	292
*Strange Bedfellows	386
Survivors (The)	374
Tonight at 8:30	329, 334
Trial by Jury	399
Where Stars Walk	326
Yeomen of the Guard (The)	361
You Nver Can Tell	307

CRITICS' CIRCLE AWARD 296

THEATRE OPENINGS
"The Cup of Trembling"
"The Rats of Norway"

**Asterisks indicate shows scheduled to play week of April 26, 1948*

Theatre Critics Reviews brings you each week the complete reviews as they originally appeared in these New York newspapers

NEW YORK JOURNAL-AMERICAN — NEW YORK WORLD-TELEGRAM
NEW YORK DAILY NEWS — NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE
NEW YORK MIRROR — NEW YORK NEWSPAPER PM
NEW YORK SUN — NEW YORK POST — NEW YORK TIMES

All Reviews reproduced by permission.

Published by CRITICS' THEATRE REVIEWS, INC.
235 East 22nd Street New York 10, N. Y.
Yearly Subscription $25.00

"The Cup of Trembling"

NEW YORK Herald Tribune

APRIL 21, 1948

= By HOWARD BARNES =

Bergner's 'Lost Evening'

A DISJOINTED drama about dypsomania gives Elisabeth Bergner a rich role at the Music Box. "The Cup of Trembling" is Louis Paul's dramatization of his own novel, "Breakdown," the new title stemming from the line in Isaiah which goes: "Behold I have taken out of thy hands the cup of trembling: thou shalt drink of it no more." The star is at her best in the role of an alcoholic who gets succor from psycho-analysis and Alcoholics Anonymous. The play does not sustain her vivid performing. Paul should have had a showman for collaborator. His script wanders through eight scenes, losing and picking up characters at random. It goes very badly to pieces in the final stanzas.

* * *

At the outset "The Cup of Trembling" offered considerable promise. The gradual crack-up of a woman columnist, who thinks she drinks for purely social reasons but winds up in Bellevue, has been sketched in a series of striking vignettes. With Millard Mitchell giving valiant support to Miss Bergner in the role of her baffled husband, there, is an acceleration of dramatic excitement right through to a brutal first-act curtain. The scenes are overwritten, but they have the same documentary honesty that distinguished "The Lost Weekend" on the screen. The last act is frittered away in interminable conversations about Freud, God and the will to help others.

Miss Bergner has not been one of this reviewer's favorite actresses in recent performances. It is a pity that her assured and unmannered acting in "The Cup of Trembling" avails little in saving a haphazard offering. She is generally fine, whether she is hitting the bottle, suffering from the shakes, or trying to escape from her particular madness. Only in the latter portions, where she is being reformed, does her characterization falter. Since her husband, Paul Czinner, has staged the work in fits and starts, it is not entirely her fault if she does falter. There is the stuff of an engrossing drama at the Music Box, but it is rarely made manifest in theatrical terms.

* * *

Mitchell has the best of the contributing portrayals, particularly in the climactic scene in which he is driven to cuffing his bibulous wife into some sort of submission. Then he quietly disappears from the drama. John Carradine, looking young and dashing, is excellent in one fragment and so is Anthony Ross, as the heroine's employer who confesses that he suffers from the same disease. Arlene Francis makes a fast, belated entrance as a high priestess of Alcoholics Anonymous and Martin Wolfson expounds at length about psychiatry, as he plucks subconscious childhood memories out of this lady in the dark. The Charles Elson settings change swiftly, but they are not too handy in making the action explicit. "The Cup of Trembling" has a theme of consequence which receives no more than stuttering dramatic statement.

'THE CUP OF TREMBLING.'

Play by Louis Paul; staged by Paul Czinner; settings by Charles Elson; costumes by Natalie Barth Walker; furs by Esther Dorothy; presented by Paul Czinner and C. P. Jaeger at the Music Box Theater Tuesday evening, April 20, 1948. The cast:

Mrs. Bonnhardt	Beverly Bayne
Ellen Croy	Elisabeth Bergner
Dr. Breen	Phillip Tonge
John Croy	Millard Mitchell
Walter Fowler	John Carradine
Jamesson	Louis Hector
Ann	Iris Mann
Gracie	Hope Emerson
A Police Officer	Robert Bolger
A Deliveryman	William Robertson
Dr Denning	Martin Wolfson
William Lundeman	Anthony Ross
Fiewee	U. T. Atherton
Sheila Vane	Arlene Francis

SYNOPSIS—Act 1, scene 1: The Croy's apartment, 10 p. m. Friday. Scene 2: Walter Fowler's home, Saturday afternoon, six weeks later. Scene 3: The Croy's apartment, that night. Scene 4: The same, next morning. Scene 5: The same, late the following afternoon. ACT II—Scene 1: Dr. Denning's office, afternoon, ten days later. Scene 2: Lundeman's office, early the same evening. Scene 3: The Croy's apartment, a few days later.

DAILY NEWS

APRIL 21, 1948

'Cup of Trembling' Rescues Miss Bergner from Likker in 8 Scenes

By JOHN CHAPMAN

It took eight scenes, one hypodermic in the behind, one psychologist, one psychiatrist, one good whupping and two members of Alcoholics Anonymous to cure Elisabeth Bergner of dipsomania last evening at the Music Box. But, by Jove, they made it, and as we all filed out a little before 11 she was nice and calm—as calm, that is, as Miss Bergner can get when she is acting.

As the audience left—to go straight home for a glass of milk, I trust—Miss Bergner was getting ready to leave, too—to go calling on some other lady stew and try to cure her.

The play is "The Cup of Trembling," Louis Paul's own dramatization of his novel, "Breakdown," which has been described as a distaff side "Lost Weekend." I don't think it is successful as drama, being rather loose at the joints and not being very exciting as it goes along. But I dutifully salute its motives, and report that Miss Bergner does a remarkably intense job of portraying a lady with the jumps.

A Brief Entrance.

She is a newspaper woman suffering from an occupational ailment known as Columnist's Disease. She is a successful byline writer and social drinking has finally got her down. When one first sees her, in fact, it is only fleetingly as she bursts in the front door of her apartment, runs clear across it to the bathroom (offstage) and throws up (offstage). Right after that is when the doctor comes and gives her the shot in the sitzplatz.

She has a nice home and a nice husband (Millard Mitchell) and a nice little adopted daughter, but she is letting them slip in favor of the bottle. Blackouts lasting from two minutes to two hours, and even being hauled off to Bellevue to dry out, frighten her and make her want to stop drinking—but she can't. One time she admits she is no good and tries to leave her husband, but he loves her—so he gives her a fine beating.

Gets to Bottom of It.

For a long time the psychiatrist gets nowhere, but he ultimately dopes it out that she is a souse because when she was 4 she hated her father for good and sufficient reasons. More help comes when she dicovers that her boss (very well played by Anthony Ross) is a former victim of a not uncommon illness known as City Editor's Disease, but has been saved by A. A.

Well, as I say, they all make it, and among those besides the ones already mentioned who give stout help are John Carradine, Louis Hector, Arlene Francis, Martin Wolfson and Beverly Bayne — a really good company. Charles Elson has designed several nice settings, but it takes quite a while to shift them.

I'm not going to worry about Miss Bergner's drinking any more. She'll be okay. But she'd better watch out or one of these nights she is going to break her pretty little neck throwing her long-bobbed hair around.

Do you mind if I slip across the street for one now while the printers are setting this?

PM EXCLUSIVE

APRIL 22, 1948

Kronenberger

A Dull Case History Of a Lady Who Drinks

As a case history of a female dipsomaniac, *The Cup of Trembling* is doubtless plausible enough. As an opportunity for Elisabeth Bergner to shoot the works, it doubtless comes close to being ideal. Merely as something to sit through, however, it constitutes one of the lengthiest and deadliest grinds imaginable. If most drunks tend to be longwinded, so do most of the people who write about them. Mr. Paul spares us nothing, neither the ravages nor the repetitiousness of alcoholism. Not a writer to flinch at the sensational—at times, indeed, he seems rather to wallow in it—he is yet not a writer who can make it pay off. His play misses fire at every level, even that of melodrama— for one reason, no doubt, because it really isn't a play, because it is an overdressed dossier, and at length an ill-concealed tract.

* * *

Structurally *The Cup of Trembling* is shaped very much like a V. The first, or sidecar-named-desire half of the evening depicts the swift descent toward Hell; the second half depicts the much slower—in more ways than one—climb toward salvation. When we first meet Ellen Croy, a New York newspaper columnist, she is already far gone—an inwardly sick and haunted woman, with no resistance whatever against drink and a terrible resistance against some dark memory in her life. As the scenes click off, Ellen's career, her husband, her home are all seen victims of her drinking and its ensuing violence; and she herself much the worst victim of all.

* * *

When the curtain rises after the intermission, Ellen is stretched out on a psychoanalyst's couch. Not stretched out very comfortably or co-operatively; but a start has been made, something is being done about Ellen's past as the best hope of assuring her a future. And later that day, she finds that her editor had been as bad a drunk as herself, and still has a fight on his hands. But it's not till Ellen has a session with an understanding lady from Alcoholics Anonymous, that a real corner is turned; and not till the analyst pries out of her the childhood cause of her grown-up anguish, that salvation becomes a real possibility.

* * *

One wonders why a play that is neither unintelligent nor uninformed should seem so crude and dull—till one grasps that that's part of the reason. Mr. Paul is *using* the facts and knowledge that a better writer would merely have started from. Very often, moreover, he uses them without sensibility; and still oftener, without enough dramatic effect. Considering how much sensational detail there is in *The Cup*, it's a kind of achievement-in-reverse to make it so dull; considering, again, the nature and degree of the heroine's plight, it's rather remarkable that the role should prove so unaffecting. Yet it is, even with Miss Bergner giving it the aforementioned works.

It is certainly past arguing that in certain respects Miss Bergner is an extraordinary performer. In *The Cup of Trembling* she often makes Ellen Croy much more real than the script does. So that one can only wonder why she isn't as rewarding as she ought to be: and I think it's less because she is mannered than because she is what might be called incessant. Sydney Smith referred to Macaulay's brilliant loquaciousness as punctuated by "delightful flashes of silence"; just so, Miss Bergner's acting might benefit by a few delightful outbursts of repose. Though Dr. Czinner has not staged the play well, there are nice performances by Arlene Francis, Millard Mitchell, Louis Hector, Martin Wolfson and Anthony Ross.

—LOUIS KRONENBERGER

New York World-Telegram

APRIL 21, 1948

'Cup of Trembling' Strong but Not Deep

By WILLIAM HAWKINS.

In the "The Cup of Trembling" Elisabeth Bergner has found herself a play that would be dear to the heart of any self-respecting dramatic actress.

Within the first few minutes after her entrance, she has made several mad dashes up and down some stairs, been violently sick at her stomach, had an injection in her hip, described an attempt to attack her, and otherwise established the fact that she is a nervous wreck and an habitual drinker.

For the next three hours she is never off the stage except for the purpose of making impassioned exits.

Hope Comes at Last.

She pursues the course of an alcoholic through thick and thin, until she is arrested in a brawl and sent to Bellevue. It is then that she decides she must divorce her husband and get away from their adopted child before she ruins their lives. Frantic at her defeatist attitude, her husband administers her a very thorough beating.

The second half of the play narrates her efforts to cure herself. After many discouragements, she finds hope through the combined efforts of a psychoanalyst and Alcoholics Anonymous.

"The Cup of Trembling" is consistently more of a case history than a drama. Its material is undoubtedly authentic, and it is academically interesting, but it is rarely moving. There is a documentary air about it that shows a lack of imagination. Certain climaxes are treated with great excitement, but the play as a whole is clinical.

The immediate trouble of the leading figure, a newspaper columnist, comes from an incident which occurs when she has grown into the habit of constant drinking to remain amiable at cocktail parties her work obligates her to attend.

She only remembers that something distasteful happened when she accepted a taxi ride from a stranger. From there out she accepts the drinking as an escape, and tugs at the bottle with disastrous results to her nerves, her marriage and her work.

The cure is somewhat vaguely explained. She finally is forced to recall a terrifying moment as a child with her father. It has prevented her achieving any full feminine significance. The A.A. influence, interestingly depicted, is far too rapid to be convincing.

Miss Bergner has a real gamut to employ her acting abilities here. The role is intense from start to finish, and aside from certain repetitious handling and combing of her hair, the business with which she exploits the part is effective and fascinating.

The play is presented so that practically every scene concentrates on her, and she is inventive enough to justify the attention. The difficulty is that her performance occasionally resembles an endurance contest, and when all is told, one has been interested in this woman without feeling the slightest tug of sympathy for her.

Miss Francis Convincing.

Of the other performances, far and away the most effective one is that of Arlene Francis, who only appears in the last scene as the member of Alcoholics Anonymous. It would be the easiest thing in the world to make this part turn out priggish or slap happy. Miss Francis gives it conviction by playing with the utmost good humor as a surface to real integrity.

Millard Mitchell is an inevitably knowing actor, who is here pretty much forced into the background. The character is neither clear nor interesting, and its only real vitality comes in connection with the questionable sport of walloping his wife.

John Carradine has a subdued bit as a friend who is vaguely in love with the alcoholic, and Anthony Ross is frantically tenacious in his one scene as her employer who is something of a drinker himself, but steers her towards A.A.

The visual action gets flow and variety from the two-level set Charles Elson designed for the couple's apartment.

New York Post

APRIL 21, 1948

Crusade Against Drink Makes Dubious Drama

By RICHARD WATTS JR.

Miss Bergner is a serious and conscientious actress, and her portrayal of a lady alcoholic in "The Cup of Trembling," which came to the Music Box last night, is a scientific study of mental and moral disintegration. I have no doubt that the play by Louis Paul is realistic to the last detail in its contemplation of the havoc wrought by excessive drinking, and that the portrayal of a psychiatrist at work curing the weaknesses of the afflicted is without a flaw in its accuracy. As a tract for the worthy Alcoholics Anonymous, the new drama is conceivably an admirable educational force.

The sad fact remains, however, that as a play "The Cup of Trembling" is dull, monotonous, repetitious and far from emotionally moving. Indeed, I even have certain doubts about it as propaganda for a worthy cause. Without question it makes its points about the perils of uncurbed imbibing, particularly among women, newspapermen and other sensitive classes. My only fear is that it is so painfully unstimulating dramatically that it is likely to send the average playgoer rushing to a nearby bar, rather than away from one. If the reformed heroine had taken that final drink last night I am afraid the audience would have applauded.

Neurotic Columnist

According to the play, Miss Bergner was a neurotic newspaper columnist, if that is not a redundancy, who took to drink for reasons it required the wise psychiatrist many scenes to discover. In fact, she got herself into such a state that two drinks and a look at John Carradine would cause her to collapse. Although married to a long-suffering husband, who beat her into insensibility for her own good, she went on a particularly sizable bender, in the course of which she assaulted a stranger and, apparently as a sign of complete disintegration, bought an expensive Oriental rug.

The poor lady was, it seems, in an extremely bad way until three forces for good came into her life. The first was that psychiatrist, who finally discovered that as a child she had been scared by her hairy father, who was angry because she wasn't a boy. The second was her editor, who confided to the girl columnist that he, too, had become a drunkard when he was a reporter on the old "World," and was still having quite a battle with his journalistic habits. The third was a friendly lady ex-alcoholic who was willing to make the sacrifice of taking a drink with the heroine to save her. Save her they did, too.

Its Points

Although "The Cup of Trembling" is written with more accuracy than artistry, it has its points. For example, it is probably the first drama yet written in which a character played by Mr. Carradine is called "cute." It is likewise the only play of the season in which any character refers to himself as "a crusty old bachelor." As a final distinction, it is a drama which makes the fascinating revelation that the job of running a column "sometimes involves a tremendous amount of activity," thus making it inevitable that the columnists take to drink. Otherwise it is less memorable.

The play is almost entirely Miss Bergner, who gives a characteristically artful account of herself and always manages to be believable. The other roles are virtually bits, but they are excellently played. Arlene Francis in particular, is remarkably fresh and vital as the reformed lady drinker, a role which might easily have been unbearable in its smugness. A favorite actor of mine, Milliard Mitchell, is excellent as the tolerant but embattled husband, and Louis Hector has an amusing bit as a ferocious conservative. But none of them can make the new temperance crusade interesting.

Journal and American

APRIL 21, 1948

Weak Drama On Alcoholics

By ROBERT GARLAND

Last night, in the Music Box, the stage was paved with good intentions. There, Elisabeth Bergner, "supreme in Berlin, beloved in Paris and praised in London" according to the program, spoke many words endorsing Alcoholics Anonymous and the undeniable fine deeds that organization has been known to do. She spoke them indistinctly and with an accent as Ellen Croy, the unheroic heroine of "The Cup of Trembling," a play by Louis Paul.

Taking his title from Isaiah—"Behold, I have taken out of thy hands the cup of trembling and thou shalt drink of it no more"—Mr. Paul calls his play "the study of a woman." Which, crudely enough, it is!

A cushy columnist on a metropolitan journal, his Ellen Croy is as lush and lovely as a cushy columnist can be. But she's no happy girl to know. At the Music Box only her managing editor can put up with her.

Here, Louis Paul—whoever Mr. Paul may be—has material for a poignant and penetrating play. But he muffs it every time. At the Music Box laughs come when tears should flow, and there's no common sense in it.

* * *

Not to me there isn't. And, in a manner of speaking, I'm one who conceivably might know. In "The Cup of Trembling," as planned by the playwright and projected by the players, the tremblers are phony and their cup is filled with the bourbon of bewilderment as to what their trembling's for.

In his "study of a woman," Mr. Paul covers a lost fortnight in two acts and four times that many scenes. When you meet Ellen Croy on Friday, the skids of alcoholism are actively beneath her.

Two weeks later, she's an Alcoholic Anonymous of standing. Dressed becomingly by Hattie Carnegie, with her pint of bourbon untouched up on a table, she's off to cure a Tenth Street tippler who, cup trembling in hand, waits down there to greet her. It's nice to see how quickly the lush and lovely columnist has snapped out of her unbecoming lushness.

You, too, would be sober and self-satisfied if you could believe her. But, not having believed her throughout the evening, there's no reason to believe her now that the evening and the play are over.

* * *

Elisabeth Bergner, no longer supreme in Berlin, beloved in Paris or praised in London, is, as I have said, indistinct and accented as the lush and lovely columnist. And her acting, done mostly with her hair, is studied and ineffectual. Under the direction of her husband, Paul Czinner, the Bergner mannerisms have increased and the Bergner effectiveness has lessened. Never is her Ellen Croy three dimentional.

The others, for the most part, are bitten by the Bergner bravura. Especially the women. Only Arlene Francis, got up like anything by Martha, brings seriousness to bear upon a serious playwriting premise.

The men are an improvement on the women. Millard Mitchell, playing a non-comic role with a straight face, is what the playwright ordered as Miss Bergner's sober and long-suffering husband. It's grand to see him knock the stuffing out of Ellen Croy as the first act curtain falls. Anthony Ross and Louis Hector aren't bad in badly written roles. John Carradine is legitimate as all get-out as Walter Fowler.

But, when counted and considered, "The Cup of Trembling" is a trivial piece about a far from trivial problem. Thanks to its mistaken triviality, it's the most unpleasant play in town.

Daily Mirror

APRIL 21, 1948

'Cup of Trembling' At Music Box

By ROBERT COLEMAN

"The Cup of Trembling," which Paul Czinner and C. P. Jaeger brought to the Music Box Theatre last evening, gives Elisabeth Bergner the opportunity for an emotional field day. Needless to say, Miss Bergner makes the most of it. She burns up energy at an astounding rate.

Miss Bergner impersonates an alcoholic who is finally saved through psychoanalysis and Alcoholics Anonymous. Though she is a successful newspaper columnist, foster mother of a little girl and wife of a promising young lawyer, she cannot leave the stuff alone.

Her column becomes a flop and her home life dismal indeed. She tears herself apart trying to overcome her weakness. To her amazement, she eventualy discovers that the editor of her paper also is a victim of the Demon Rum.

He persuades her to attend a meeting of Alcoholics Annonymous, while her husband forces her to try psychoanalysis. The combination proves a success.

Author Louis Paul has written earnestly but ineffectually. Much of his script is hard to swallow.

Miss Bergner has always been one to mix an excess of motion with her emotion and, given the role of a nerve-wracked, neurotic drunkard, she turns the part into a study in perpetual motion.

Millard Mitchell, ordinarily an actor who works with restraint, occasionally caught the Bergner fever and indulged in some useless shadow-boxing as the hapless husband. Arlene Francis gives, in our opinion, the best performance of the evening in a brief appearance as a determined worker for Alcoholics Anonymous.

Though "The Cup of Trembling" was apparently fashioned to aid and comfort those addicted to drink and beset by touchy nerves, we think it is likely to have an adverse effect on some playgoers. We are not given to intemperance, but by the evening's end we were tempted.

The Sun

APRIL 21, 1948

By WARD MOREHOUSE.

Dipsomania in a Dull Play.

"The Cup of Trembling," a drama about a dipsomaniac, is one of the most overpoweringly tedious plays that has struck this island since the theater flourished 'way downtown in John street. The first performance, encased in some elaborately realistic scenery, was given last night at the Music Box.

Louis Paul wrote this new piece from his novel, "Breakdown." He has turned out a preachment, a clinical report, instead of a play and he tells a slow-gaited maddeningly repetitious story of a woman columnist who had a craving for drink and of the struggle she makes to conquer it.

"The Cup of Trembling" may hold some interest for Alcoholics Anonymous and possibly for such institutions as Towns Hospital and the Hartford Retreat, but as a play it is crude, episodic and floundering. And quite tiresome for most of the evening.

There is occasionally a good scene. Such as that when Ellen Croy's long-suffering husband methodically reads a police report of a ruction she created at a bar, and that in which the psychiatrist makes the revelation that Ellen's drinking is brought on by a desire to escape from a nightmare held over from childhood.

Elisabeth Bergner, frequently inaudible, brings her vivid, intense, gasping and often fascinating style of acting to the role of Ellen, a seemingly hopeless dipsomaniac, who triumphs after a long and bitter fight with alcohol. But the play at the Music Box is so diffuse and so inexpert not even a Bernhardt could sustain interest in the character of Ellen more than intermittently.

Ariene Francis gives some life to the proceedings, and when it is greatly needed, with an attractive and direct performance as a fighting member of A. A., which rushes to the rescue. Millard Mitchell contributes his usual good performance, this time as the confused husband of the hard-drinking Ellen. The psychiatrist is well played by Martin Wolfson. Anthony Ross is amusing as a reformed drunk and Hope Emerson is very funny as the harassed maid in the troubled house of Croy.

"The Cup of Trembling," staged by Dr. Paul Czinner, has been cut considerably since its try-out opening, but it is still an exhausting and long-spun drama.

The New York Times

APRIL 21, 1948

Elisabeth Bergner in 'The Cup of Trembling' Analyzes the Causes of Alcoholism in a Lady Columnist

By BROOKS ATKINSON

In one of her least attractive moods Elisabeth Bergner is sharing the torment of alcoholism with the audience in "The Cup of Trembling," put on at the Music Box last evening. Not some of the torment: all of it down to the most harrowing details. Miss Bergner is a remarkable actress with a taste for detail that amounts to obsession. She can analyze a character scientifically; she can express it in acting meticulously documented with gestures, movement, glances and vocal inflections.

* * *

Obviously the chief person in "The Cup of Trembling" has fascinated her as a problem in character analysis and expression. Louis Paul's "study of a woman," as the program defines it, chronicles the cure of a female columnist who cannot stop drinking. She is Ellen Croy, newspaper woman, married to a pleasant barrister and foster mother to a charming little girl. After one of the longest plays Eugene O'Neill never wrote, she and a whole regiment of doctors, psychiatrists, policemen and fellow drunks pluck out the heart of her trouble and relieve her of alcoholism. It will be lucky if this painful spectacle does not drive most of the first-nighters to alcoholism in a body. A lot of folks poured out of the theatre with their tongues hanging out when the final curtain summoned sufficient energy to come down.

* * *

For "The Cup of Trembling" is no more than a clinical study in a baffling disease. It is humorless, not because it lacks funny lines but because it has no sense of proportion. Is it necessary, for example, to give Miss Bergner a hypodermic in the buttocks? That astonishing gaucherie may give you some notion of the humorlessness of this spectacle. It is merely the most sensational of the ineptitudes.

Obviously a lot of hard work has gone into this production. The settings by Charles Elson are elaborate and beautifully lighted. The costumes by Natalie Barth Walker are notably chic. Under Paul Czinner's painfully pedantic direction, a number of good actors conspire to sober Miss Bergner up. Millard Mitchell as the husband, who has the pleasure of beating her up at the end of the first act, Arlene Francis as a reformed lush, Philip Tonge as the hypodermic wizard, Martin Wolfson as a dogged psychiatrist, John Carradine as a high-minded bachelor, Anthony Ross as a journalistic drunkard, Louis Hector as a pompous attorney, Beverly Bayne as an anxious mother, Hope Emerson as a husky cook—they all behave creditably.

* * *

But "The Cup of Trembling" is Miss Bergner's dish almost exclusively. From the technical point of view her performance is no doubt superb. She has a thousand details to make every point in the characterization, and they are valid points, too. But is this art or is it merely histrionic scholarship? Although it pictures everything vividly, it conveys no emotion. And although Miss Bergner probably wants to portray the anguish of a stricken woman, she succeeds only in making her monotonous. She seems to be psychoanalyzing the theatre. The findings and conclusions are more interesting to her than they are to anyone else.

"The Rats of Norway"

The New York Times

APRIL 16, 1948

Norwegian Sad Sacks

By BROOKS ATKINSON

In time the actors and the audience will recover. But at the moment Keith Winter's "The Rats of Norway," which was dumped on the stage at the Booth last evening, seems to have added ten years to the life of everyone on both sides of the footlights. Observing all the dramatic unities, a bad play has been badly acted under the morbid spell of ingeniously bad direction.

Mr. Winter is author of "The Shining Hour," which seemed intelligent as long ago as 1934. Less than a decade ago "The Rats of Norway" was acted in London by a gold-plated cast that included Laurence Olivier, Raymond Massey and Gladys Cooper. There is no record of any ensuing suicides, murders or mass arrests. Possibly the American producer picked up the wrong script amid the litter on his office table. Would that a couple of other fellows had seen it in another city — Lhasa, for example.

Out of the drone of many words the impression rises that Mr. Winter is writing about the neuroses, frustrations, bad temper, dipsomania and sexual abnormalities of the faculty of a preparatory school in Northumberland. It must be a terrible place. Fortunately, none of the little boys appear in the play, although their happy laughter can be heard offstage in one scene.

The Rats of Norway.'

Play by Keith Winter; settings by William De Forest; staged by James R. Elliott; presented by James R. Elliot, in association with Carl Schroeer, at the Booth Theater, April 15, 1948. The cast:

Robin Clayden	Colin Keith-Johnston
Jane Clayden	Jeanne Stuart
Stevan Beringer	William Howell
Tilly Shane	Rett Kitson
Mann	Arthur Gould-Porter
Weyland	Victor Wood
Chatwood	Bart Jotor
Hugh Sebastian	John Ireland

SYNOPSIS: The action of the play takes place at Paligates, a preparatory school in Northumberland, over a period of seven months.

Journal American

APRIL 16, 1948

English School Play 'Not Quite So Good'

By ROBERT GARLAND

This Jimmy Elliott is getting to be a big boy-producer now. If he doesn't watch out, he'll come of age with a fine future behind him. Boy and boy, he has produced two previous plays on Broadway. Each worked up a run of five consecutive performances.

The first, Irving Elman's "The First Million," was at the Ritz in 1943. The second, "Too Hot for Maneuvers" by Less White and Bud Pearson, was at the Broadhurst in 1945. The third, at the Booth for the time being, is, I'll tell you, something else again.

For here's a play, "Keith Winter's "The Rats of Norway," by an established author which, with Lawrence Olivier, Gladys Cooper and Raymond Massey in the roles entrusted now to William Howell, Jeanne Stuart and John Ireland, was a London hit 15 years ago.

Having read "The Rats of Norway," I don't dislike it. Still another oh-so-English school-play brought into fashion by "Young Woodley," it's better than most and not as good as John Van Druten's. But I do dislike what the big boy-producer has done with it.

• • •

An Old Legend

Despite the title of last night's delayed exposure, the piece has nothing to do with "rats" or "Norway." Instead, the caption harks back to an old Norwegian legend in which some dimwit rodents swim out to sea in search of an island that isn't there.

They've got nothing on the English characters inhabiting the play which has taken a decade-and-a-half to get from Charing Cross to Broadway. These two-legged British lemmings are equally at sea as directed by the big boy-producer doubling as big boy-director.

You can't tell me there isn't more to Keith Winter's "The Rats of Norway" than has met Jimmy Elliott's big-boyish ear and eye. Even two-legged British lemmings couldn't be as dim-witted as their trans-Atlantic set-up makes them out to be on 45th st.

Beside the Shubert Alley, the head-master's wishful wife and the head-master's alcoholic helper are keen about each other right underneath the head-master's non-observant nose, while Stevan Beringer and Tilly Shane are just about as keen as they are.

• • •

Why Did He Do It

Sitting politely while (I quote) two pairs of lovers, one young and romantic, the other mature and passionate (I unquote) swim out to sea and drown themselves in the choppy waters of Jimmy Elliott's direction, you wonder why the big boy-producer took up directing, anyway.

Because he did, however, so experienced a performer as Colin Keith-Johnston turns in a fidgety impersonation of the head-master at Paligates, while, as his double-crossing helpmate, Jeanne Stuart remains as calm and collected as a suburban cottage pudding.

Of the featured players—Colin Keith-Johnston, William Howell, Jeanne Stuart, Rett Kitson and John Ireland—only Mr. Ireland, as the head-master's alcoholic helper, acts as if he knew what the playwright, rather than the producer-director, had in mind.

Against a handsome background by William de Forrest, the players do what they can to please themselves as actors, Keith Winter, as playwright, and Jimmy Elliott, the big boy-producer who's getting to be a big boy-director, too. In consequence, they please nobody. Not even definitely pro-Jimmy Elliott me!

New York World-Telegram

APRIL 16, 1948

'The Rats of Norway' Limns the Lemmings

By WILLIAM HAWKINS.

When the "Rats of Norway" was written some 15 years ago, it may have been bearable to listen all evening to a group of characters indulge in microscopic emotional self analysis. Nowadays they sound selfish beyond relief and utterly unimportant.

This is the kind of play in which there is very little physical motion. It represents a group of people in constricted circumstances who rub off on each other to the point of exasperation.

No one is actually sympathetic. Here pettiness and treachery are never undertones, but played on the surface until the general lack of civility is simply offensive.

The action takes place in an English preparatory school. The fussy and incompetent headmaster is married to a beautiful woman who is coolly officious about managing the place.

On the staff are a surly drunk who attracts people by his careless rudeness, an introspective young girl, and a pleasant enough young man of shaky affections.

Two Love Affairs.

The play tells of two love affairs, one between the two younger people, and the other between the headmaster's wife and the ill-mannered professor.

Each couple sets about destroying itself by the demands each partner makes on the other.

The younger girl, Tilly, is romantically devoted to Stevan, but is so sensitive and unsophisticated that she bores him to death trying to do whatever she thinks he wants at any given moment. The result is that she is without personality at any time. The fault with the telling of this story is that the early love scenes are unconvincing, so nothing is left but the wrangling.

The other affair is a frankly physical one.

Jane is not brave enough to give up the stuffy security she enjoys as wife of the school's head. No longer young, she wants this safety, but she wants the love of Sebastian, too. He is unable to sustain the position of a backdoor convenience for her passions, and constantly drinks though he knows it may kill him.

All Miss Happiness.

This romance involves a good deal of circumlocution about sex. Often it is trite, as in remarks like "You only love me in one way." Other times it is embarrassing, as in the argument about the awkwardness of adultery now that cold weather has set the hour of the students' games back from four to two in the afternoon.

There are three other professors who appear on the scene from time to time, but they are of no particular interest except to make more convincing the unutterable dullness of school life.

In the end there is no happiness for any one. The younger people have picked each other apart, and just when Jane would go away with Sebastian, he dies in her room so her affair is revealed to

her husband.

The staging does nothing to relieve the abrupt breaks between scenes, so that actors are constantly left waiting onstage for a new character to appear in the same door through which another just left.

The humorlessness of the roles leads the actors to play with a peculiar awesome pomposity. The cast includes Colin Keith-Johnston, Jeanne Stuart, William Howell, Rett Kitson and John Ireland.

It seems odd that a play no older than this should give the feeling of a period piece, but the isolated Bronte-like self-absorption of these people sounds as if the radio and the telephone had not yet been invented.

Daily Mirror

APRIL 16, 1948

'Rats of Norway' Is British Import

By ROBERT COLEMAN

The biggest bore of the season arrived at the Booth Theatre last evening. It's Keith Winter's "The Rats of Norway," which spent years finding a producer over here. James S. Elliott finally proved the fall guy.

The play gets its title from the lemmings—a type of rodent—that swim out from a Norwegian town to find an island that has sunk beneath the seas and drown because of their foolishness.

We always thought England's great men were produced on the playing fields of its schools. Perhaps they were. Anyway, the decline in the greatness of England's leaders might be attributed to such schools as are typified by that in "The Rats of Norway."

This is a school where sex, booze and neurosis reign. The weakling headmaster's wife falls for one of the teachers. Another teacher, prepping to become headmaster of his father's school, falls in love with another femme on the premises.

According to the program, they are frustrated in their loves and spiritually drown because of it. The teacher that fell in love with the headmaster's wife, literally died in her bedroom after a terrific drinking bout.

And that lady, characterized in the program as a strong woman, cried out to her husband for help to move the dead intruder back to his own room, but the coward took it on the lam. She had to locate help in another quarter.

The other pair of lovers were mighty befuddled, too, by the time the final curtain fell. And it seemed as if it never would fall. The running time of "The Rats of Norway" is not excessive, but an evening at the Booth seems like a veritable lifetime.

"The Rats of Norway" is a satire on the English chin-up, old boy, old school tie, drama. It's packed with cliches which sent the first nighters into spasms of laughter. That is, those first nighters who suffered from insomnia and the on-stage noises.

Citations for bravery under fire should go to Jeanne Stuart, Colin Keith-Johnston, William Howell, Rett Kitson, Arthur Gould-Porter, Victor Wood, Bert Jeter and John Ireland.

How they waded through Winter's stilted, pretentious twaddle without howling is a mystery. They must have wonderful control of their facial muscles and senses of humor.

The best performer in the cast for our money last night was a chap who looked like a younger edition of Cedric Hardwicke. If our reading of the program be accurate, he is Victor Wood.

If any organization has a spare medal around for the most feeble and futile play of the season, they might consider "The Rats of Norway."

The Sun

APRIL 16, 1948

By WARD MOREHOUSE.

Quick! Some Rat Poison!

"The Rats of Norway" is dreadful stuff. Played some seasons ago in London by a reputable cast and done recently in California for a single performance, Keith Winter's drama made an ill-advised apearance last evening at the Booth and promptly fell on its face. A dull and doltish play, and the acting is fairly monstrous.

There's a program note which ties up the title of the play with a Far North legend of incautious lemmings (Scandinavian rodents) that swim out to sea and meet their death in drowning. Well, the play that is given you at the Booth is about love and frustration and general grief, along with a bit of homosexuality, at a preparatory school in Northumberland. The principal trouble with "The Rats of Norway" is that you never care at all what happens to its leading characters, and many things do.

Such as what? If you care for more detail, the wife of the fatuous headmaster has an affair with the strange, drunken faculty member who is in charge of athletics. There is unfulfilled love between a new and somewhat idealistic member of the staff and the girl who teaches music. Everything is woeful and doleful and the final curtain falls on tragedy. It just didn't fall soon enough.

John Ireland as the bitter lover of the headmaster's wife, Jeanne Stuart as the wife, and William Howell and Miss Rett Kitson as the other lovers are frequently so inept burlesque creeps into the proceedings. And Colin Keith-Johnston, who was the best actor for miles around when he was the heroic Captain Stanhope in "Journey's End," is somewhat embarrassing in his jumpy, jerky performance as the fussy and fusty imbecile who runs the strange institution called Fallgates. The evening is a little more bearable when it is in the hands of the minor players, Victor Wood, Arthur Gould-Porter and Bert Jeter.

Things do go on at these English schools. Indeed they do, if we're to take the word of the playwrights. Keith Winter once wrote a sound theater piece in "The Shining Hour." His "Rats of Norway" is a crude and irksome drama, and it is made to seem worse than it actually is by one of the most frightful performances a cast of professional grownups has given in my time.

New York Post

APRIL 16, 1948

Extremely Dull Rodents, Those Norway Rats

By RICHARD WATTS, JR.

For a long time I have been hearing about a play called "The Rats of Norway," in which Laurence Olivier, Raymond Massey and Gladys Cooper had quite a pre-war success in London. It was the work of an English novelist and playwright named Keith Winter, who once wrote a pretty good drama called "The Shining Hour," and it was reported to be something to remember. Well, it was staged at the Booth Theatre last night, and there is little doubt that the first-nighters will remember it.

The only trouble is that their recollection will be of one of the most incredible things, in writing, direction and acting, they have encountered all season. Of course, with Miss Cooper and the Messrs. Olivier and Massey acting its leading roles, it may not have seemed as terrible as it did last night, but I can't imagine the best playing in the world keeping it from being dull and ridiculous. The current cast seems worthy of the material at hand.

Public School Love

"The Rats of Norway" is one of those plays in which the passionate but loveless wife of the headmaster at an English public school falls in love with a violent young member of the faculty. There is also another youthful teacher who loves a girl instructor in music, until she makes the mistake of trying to please him. It may have been my imagination which made me suspect that the two young men were more interested in each other than in either of the women, but, anyway, none of the romances came out well.

There were a lot of other characters about the school, all of them offensive in one way or another. In particular, there were three of the subordinate masters, who were always gabbling at each other in a manner suggesting that they were playing the three witches in a modern-clothes production of "Macbeth." It appears that they were intended as comedy relief, but, since they were neither comic or served as relief, they hardly added to the evening's joy.

The Lemmings

Conceivably it might interest you to learn something about the title. It seems that the lemmings, who are Norwegian rats, have a curious way of swimming out to sea and drowning, and that the author suspects a certain mystic comparison with his major lovers and their doomed romance. Mr. Winter also wrote his sad story as a novel, which, I am assured, had a certain merit. There is assuredly none to be found in the play, which is a crazyquilt of antique emotional cliches.

Everything was so bad last night that it seems a shame to take it out on the actors, who have suffered enough. It should suffice to say that John Ireland was the passionate teacher, Jeanne Stuart the restless wife, William Howell and Rett Kittson the distraught younger couple, and Colin Keith-Johnston the jittery headmaster. James S. Elliott, the producer, also directed, and therefore, has only himself to blame for some odd stage maneuvers. It was a long and melancholy evening, signifying nothing.